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SUBJECT: FORGING A STRATEGY TO ELIMINATE FGM IN SUDAN

¶1. (SBU) The National Council for Children's Welfare (NCCW) in Sudan held a conference in late December 2007 to announce its strategy for eliminating female genital mutilation (FGM), or female circumcision. UNICEF and PLAN Sudan also attended, as did Dr. Samia Ahmed Mohamed, Minister of Social Welfare, and Amira Al-Fadel, Secretary General of the National Council for Children's Welfare.

¶2. (SBU) The ambitious goal of the conference was to establish a national strategy that would eliminate FGM in the next ten years, or "in a generation." Sudanese human rights activists and government officials also participated, lending some credibility to the proceedings. However, technical advisor Nahid Jabrallah told poloff that the Sudanese government did not provide any financial assistance to the project's efforts to end FGM, but did provide office space and four local employees. The remainder of the project's cost was covered by UNICEF.

¶3. (SBU) Fifteen percent of FGM procedures in Sudan are infibulations, the most extreme form. According to the NCCW, traditionally between eighty and ninety percent of girls under 18 years of age have been subjected to FGM. A technical committee was formed in early 2007 to develop a strategy aimed at eradicating the procedure, with representatives from the ministries of health, education, and information as well as NGOs. In late 2007, a bill was passed by the National Assembly and signed by the president criminalizing the procedure, a major step for Sudan.

¶4. (SBU) The conference recommended several steps: providing universal health care for children; media campaigns; building capacity of organizations and NGOs working to end the practice; creating a database and conducting researches and studies; dealing with FGM as a social issue and not solely a women's issue; and engaging religious leaders in spreading awareness of the dangers of the procedure. The government of Sudan is one of the signatories of the 1990 International Convention on the Rights of the Child. According to a national survey conducted in 1999, FGM was performed on ninety percent of Sudanese girls, but the NCCW says that through its work and increased awareness of the dangers of FGM, this number was reduced to 69.4% in 2006. These numbers obviously indicate some success, but also reveal how difficult it is to break such a culturally ingrained, though incredibly harmful, procedure.

FERNANDEZ